

March 24, 1934.

## Sixty-five Years Old--or Young.

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(Note:--This was written a day or two after my 65th birthday. It was not revised because at the time I could not read what I had written, eyesight having failed, although I could operate a typewriter from habit. I realized that it was entirely too long and had in mind attempting another and a shorter version. It might be interesting to compare them--same writer, same subject, but each written without reference to the other.)

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"Sixty-five years ago, March 24, 1869, a baby was born in Rockford, Illinois, which I have been told was me. I have never had reason to doubt the correctness of that statement, although so far as I am concerned it is pure hearsay, because I was and am no more conscious of the event than of that prenatal limbo that preceded birth and continued for about two years thereafter.

"My real life began with consciousness, which began so early and my statements of early first recollections have met with so much incredulity that for many years I have hesitated to repeat them. Simply as a record of my own individual impressions I will here repeat that I have a very distinct visual memory of lying in my mother's arms, of the rather unexpected appearance of a baby sister when I was two years old, and of the first pangs of jealousy I experienced when I realized that she was occupying my old place in my mother's arms.

"My first real awakening to consciousness came when I was three years old and my father and mother picked me up, because I was too tired to walk, and carried me across a bridge. It was night, a full moon was just beyond reach in the roof of the sky, and a bright, shin-







ing, rippling river flowed underneath the bridge. I seemed suddenly to awake to consciousness of the world about me. It was a beautiful world, and has seemed beautiful ever since. From that moment to this life has been crowded with impressions and at the most unexpected moments those impressions come back to me quite vividly. If life is to be measured by experiences and impressions, then mine has been full, rich, and long, with the good and the bad, the bright and the dark, all mixed up inextricably.

"The 'awakening', as I think of that moonlight scene on the bridge, came during my third year at Rock Falls where my parents were living at the time and where my father built a little house under my interested observation.

"Then my parents <sup>returned</sup> ~~moved~~ to Rockford. They were both young, father twenty years and mother eighteen years older than I. As a precocious infant they were proud of me and father often took me to the shop with him. He was a molder in a foundry and his shopmates made much of me. Quickly I learned all the various processes, and to this day, sixty years later, I believe that I could go into a foundry and set up a mold.

"At the age of six a great event occurred. I was sent to school. Most decidedly I did not like it. The innumerable horde of other boys, many of them larger than I was, impressed me most unfavorably. I discovered that I was shy and diffident. For a time I submitted to many indignities in tears and anguish until even the smaller boys began to pick on me. Then one day at recess I was goaded to desperation and fought back. I promptly reduced the weaker contingent to tears and flight, and when the larger boys rallied to their rescue I had the good fortune to knock out, scratch out, punch out, and bite out, the acknowledged bully. With that I discovered that all the larger boys were really cowards and bullies and I acquired an access of bravado.







Life was distinctly brighter after that. Then, too, the teachers were strangely cal<sup>l</sup>ous, indifere<sup>n</sup>t and indiscriminating. I sincerely hate<sup>d</sup> them, until finally one of the teachers discovered that my handwriting was passibly good. For the Friday afternoon exercises she had me write a sentence on the blackboard for the admiration of all beholders. That, of course, was quite proper and as it should be. But it inspired me<sup>with the ambition</sup> to excell all others and from that moment I really applied myself. Within a few weeks I was the caligraphic wonder of ~~the~~ the school. Thereafter Friday afternoon exhibitions were a triumph for me.

"Of the innumerable recollections that crowd about me concerning Rockford one stands out preeminent--the vision of Rock River in the sunlight. To me it looked as broad and majestic as the Mississippi, rippling, shining, and flashing in the sunlight over a rocky bottom. Nearly half a century later I had occasion to pass through Beloit, Wisconsin, the Gretna Green of northern Illinois where my father and mother had married after eloping from Rockford. It was interesting to me not only because it might account for my presence on earth but because it was on the magnificent Rock River. As we approached and passed through the town I kept my eyes riveted on the landscape watching for the beautiful river of childhood memories. We crossed a sluggish looking little creek, but there was no sign of a river. I asked the conductor about it, and to my profound disgust and disappointment he said that the creek I had seen was the river. Bah!

"The age of eight marked the beginning of another life epoch. Father was young, mentally alert, physically strong, skilled in his trade, ambitious, and at piece work surpassed his shopmates, and by working like a demon twelve hours a day he sometimes made as much as four or five dollars a day, regular wages being about two dollars and







fifty cents a day. But, easy come, easy go; he spent his wages as fast as he earned them and saved nothing for a rainy day. This did not suit mother who wanted to own a home of her own and to get on in the world. So she nagged him constantly about the joys of going west and getting a homestead and becoming a prosperous farmer. Through an acquaintance he got into correspondence with a family in Lamar County, Texas. He visited the family and was there three months. His letters were not optimistic. Mother reached a great decision. She wrote father that she and the children would arrive at Paris, Texas, on a certain train. She advertised and sold the household goods for enough to pay our railway fare. We went.

"To me, the eight year old boy, fully and keenly alive, it was a great and glorious adventure. We passed through straggling dirt ~~town~~ towns and rich farms in Illinois, crossed the great Mississippi, a portion of Missouri, ~~Kansas~~, and the wilderness of the Indian Territory, where I kept a sharp lookout for buffalo, Indians, cowboys, and desperadoes, but saw none. The trip was made in day coaches, of course. I doubt if Pullmans had been invented. I was keenly alive to everything that passed in the coach or that could be seen from the coach windows.

"Then came life in a new world, utterly wonderful to a boy without responsibilities. There was six months in a shanty on a farm where I made the acquaintance of innumerable birds, insects, reptiles, plants, and the first pony we ever owned. Nearly a year in the town where father worked at anything he could get from shingling a roof to digging a well at one dollar a day. A year with a northern family on a large farm where father worked for fifteen dollars a month and rooms, and where I was first drafted for farm work at the age of nine.

"And then mother's ambition was realized when father bought a small farm of forty acres on the prairie twenty-two miles from town







on his promissory notes secured by mortgage. What a wonderful experience it was, that trek across the open prairie to our farm. Then followed life for a year in a log cabin without windows or floor until the tenant could be displaced and we could occupy the two-room pine mansion. Came then ~~for~~ four years of continuous drouth when crops planted with hope and cultivated with much labor did not make enough to pay for the seed and we managed to live only because father went to town to work for a dollar a day, and mother, sister, and I managed and worked the farm. But it was a wonderful experience and education.

"At the age of twelve and thirteen I was the man of the little isolated family during the absence of my father. I had to plan and see executed the day's farm work, whether it was preparation, planting, cultivating, or harvesting. I learned all about horses and cattle. I was awake, alive, and fully aware of every sight, sound, and scent, and above all to the beauty that surrounded me. I came to know every plant, every bird, every insect, every reptile, not cursorily but intimately and to wonder and to speculate about them. This mental curiosity, without schooling, included everything, and as time went on it expanded to include books and anything in print. I read everything that came to hand, the Bible, Shakespeare, novels, newspapers, every scrap to the last advertisement, and my imagination was active and roamed the world while I wielded the hoe or followed the plow.

"At the end of four or five years father gave up the prairie farm as impossible and bought another of one hundred acres for eight hundred dollars within five miles of town. Here began a new life. The place had been abandoned for two or three years and was in bad condition. It meant incredible labor to bring it back. The four consecutive years of drouth were followed by five years of excessive rain, and by superhuman efforts in those five years we made the place







pay for itself and for the first time the family owned its home. It was ours. We paid it out partly by raising crops, partly by father working in town for wages, partly by mother teaching the local school, and partly by my cutting, hauling and selling cord and stove wood in the town.

"During this period there was no schooling for me, although I would have given one of my precious eyes for the privilege of going to school. In lieu of schooling I worked for neighbors in the fall picking <sup>cotton</sup> and with the proceeds bought textbooks and studied them nights. A dentist friend in town loaned us the current magazines, such as Scribners, the Century, the North American Review, and Harpers. With my fall earnings I bought a set of Emerson's and Carlyle's works, a Webster's unabridged dictionary, and a few other books. I ate up avidly history, geography, and mathematics. I committed to memory pages of material that appealed to me, the Sermon on the Mount, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, Bryant's Thanatopsis, Gray's Elegy, and many other gems, such as Lincoln's Gettysburg address, and recited them aloud as I followed the plow or wielded the hoe or axe. I waded through arithmetic, algebra, geometry and trigonometry, and even climbed into higher mathematics and surveying, committing to memory the problems that bothered me and solving them mentally as I worked in the fields. This was an interesting and strenuous life, but beset with trouble--balked ambition, a dreary outlook, and adolescent dreams of fair maidens without clothes that visited me at night and troubled my dreams. I could sympathize with St. Anthony, because I was strongly inclined to be religious and had thoughts of entering a monastery for peace and quiet and solitude. But appreciation of the beauty that was all about me was stronger than any other feeling. To this day







the song of a mocking bird will bring tears to my eyes and make me feel like swooning with pleasure.

"Then came the next stage, the announcement of a summer normal. The fee was five dollars and neither father nor I possessed that sum. It seemed utterly absurd and wholly impossible, but I became obsessed with the idea that I must attend that summer normal for school teachers. The lack of that five dollars fee was the great obstacle. But my imagination had become fired, and I insisted that father go the next day and explain the situation to the dentist friend in town and tell him that the boy he was interested in wanted to go to that summer normal and would pledge his very life to pay back a loan of five dollars.

"It worked and a week later I was duly enrolled in the summer normal. I had not been inside of a school house for several years. The two-story brick building on a bare lot in Paris, Texas, was far more impressive to me than the Capitol building in Washington proved to be years later. I was struck dumb and almost blind with awe and diffidence and felt as clumsy and ineffectual as a country terrapin. This feeling was accentuated by the fact that the secretary and treasurer of the summer normal to whom I made application and paid those precious borrowed five dollars was a mature maiden of surpassing beauty and self-possessed aplomb.

"I sat through the sessions dumb and moist as an oyster, but nothing escaped my acute and concentrated attention. Among half a hundred school teachers and college graduates I felt about as big and husky as a speck of dust. I sat silent through the daily sessions until near the close when the professor who was demonstrating the validity of the binomial theorem made a mistake in one of the signs which I detected instantly. When he got a result different from the answer given in the textbook he was puzzled and called for volunteer







explanations. There was a dead silence. Becoming impatient I raised my hand. The professor said with a note of sarcasm, 'Mr. Estabrook thinks he knows where the mistake is.' That sarcastic tone irritated me and for the moment I forgot my diffidence and relative position and I answered curtly and a little defiantly 'Certainly I know. It's staring you in the face. Change that sign and you will get the answer in the book.' He did so and got the answer. When he verified the answer he said quite respectfully, 'Well, Mr. Estabrook was right. We did not know we had a mathematician among us.' Then came examination day. I knew the answers and it was simply a matter of writing them down. I was astonished at their simplicity. I was even more astonished and somewhat indignant at seeing many others, teachers of experience and graduates of colleges, with textbooks concealed in their laps and desks which they were consulting freely in formulating their answers. It was unfair, it was wrong, it was disgraceful.

"A week later the ratings of those who attended the summer normal were announced in the local newspaper. Incredible as it seemed my name led all the rest. The examination papers of the leading five were forwarded to Austin for consideration in the State competition. Two weeks later the local paper announced that I had passed second in the State wide examination. Incredible, but it was so. It seemed ~~incredible~~ <sup>strange</sup> that I, who had not been inside of a school room for months or years and who left the corn field on Saturday as a barefoot boy and entered the county summer normal the following Monday in fear and trepidation as a country lout, should have won out in the county and State competition with experienced teachers and college graduates. Right then and there I lost all awe of school teachers and my respect for colleges and college graduates fell to zero or below--and that opinion has not changed materially in all the years that followed.







"That experience marked a turning point in my career. That fall, with father's consent, I obtained a contract to teach a country school. My board cost eleven dollars a month. The salary was thirty-five dollars a month./ At that rate I would soon become~~x~~ rich. Compared with farm work it was heaven, and I had the long evenings for study and reading. I was in such deadly earnest, so enthusiastic, and understood so well the life and psychology of my pupils, who ranged in age from five to twenty-three years, that I made a conspicuous success. I was a born teacher. I helped father with the farm after the school was over and the next fall had a call to a much larger and more important school, where I was equally successful.

"The following spring I was twenty-one. In those days a boy belonged to his parents until he was twenty-one, which on a farm meant unremitting manual labor from sun to sun from about his eighth year until he reached his majority and legal freedmm. How I had looked forward to it and dreamed of what I would do when my period of legal servitude was over. That servitude was all the harder to bear because both my father and grandfather had run away when they were boys, my father and mother had married before they were of age, and my sister married when she was sixteen and obtained in that way freedom from parental control. But I stuck it out and solaced myself with the thought that I would serve my time,<sup>and</sup> my conscience would be clear ever after. The years were slow in passing and I often wondered if I would live to be twenty-one. Surely I lived through several lives of hard work, privation, disappointment, and waiting. Mostly I dreamed about seeing the world and making my fortune, and I had rather definite and practical ideas about how I was to do it.

"Three months before emancipation I announced to my father that I would have to leave him when my birthday arrived because the farm was not big enough to support two families; nor could I see my way







to go in debt for a farm and pay for it with the prices that prevailed for farm products. He said I was quite right and he had expected it, but it meant that he would have to give up his farm because he could not work it without my help. Shortly thereafter he traded the farm for a half interest in a grocery store and he and mother went to town to live. I joined him and mother as soon as my school was out.

"To better fit myself for town life I went to a business college. I paid in advance for a six months course in bookkeeping and a six months course in shorthand and typewriting--a year in all, and settled down to about sixteen hours of concentrated study per day. It was fascinating and not difficult. I finished both courses in three months. Because of this unusual progress I was retained by the school to teach shorthand and typewriting, then bookkeeping was added, and finally I became professor of mathematics, ~~r&n~~ rhetoric and history in the North Texas University, which was an adjunct of the business college. I liked the work and was successful. From an initial salary of thirty-five dollars a month I was promoted to fifty and then to seventy-five, which was good wages in those days for a young man, and all within a year of my entrance as a novice. But I was mainly interested in shorthand, practiced indefatigably, and was soon reporting speeches and proceedings in the local courts. So within a year I was a full fledged professor~~x~~ and court reporter and made acquaintances with lawyers, preachers, and other public men and learned something from each. Then I spent a year as stenographer with a real estate loan firm and learned the law of commercial paper, real estate, and how to make abstracts of land titles, all of which wasé extremely interesting, besides doing some court reporting from time to time by courtesy of my employers.

"Then came another turn of fortune's wheel. I had seen an







advertisement of a civil service examination to be held at Dallas. With the consent of my employers I went to Dallas to see if I could pass the examination. That was quite an experience <sup>for</sup> ~~to~~ a young man who had not been on a railway train since he was a child. I heard no more of the examination until in early March, 1893, came a telegram from the War Department in Washington directing me to report for duty without delay. I did so. Within six months I was promoted and detailed to a Joint Commission of Congress to Investigate Business Methods in the Executive Departments. I became the secretary and clerical staff of the experts employed by the commission and learned at first hand the organization and work of the Federal Government, and was in contact with the principal government officials, including cabinet members, senators, representatives, and influential lobbyists of great corporations. It also included three months in New York City investigating frauds in the customhouse.

"The Commission ended with the fiscal year 1895 and I returned to the War Department. Then I settled down to routine work and rose steadily in grade. Also I went to the Corcoran Scientific School at night, followed by the Georgetown <sup>Law</sup> ~~La~~ School and the Berlitz School of Languages. Following this schooling I ~~be~~ began to buy books and entered upon a course of intensive reading of science, history, and literature, with frequent visits to the Corcoran Art Gallery and the National Museum. This was perhaps one of the happiest periods of my life, interrupted only by annual visits of my mother and sister.

"In the late fall of 1903 I ran afoul <sup>of</sup> ~~suddenly with~~ the German chief clerk of my office. It was all over a misplaced comma that in the process of typewriting had got in the wrong place. It escaped a battery of reviewers. I admitted the error frankly, ~~said~~ I hoped it would not happen again, but in saying so I was neither humble nor apologetic, which was the <sup>re</sup> ~~re~~quired attitude on such occasions. The







communications were all in official writing and were long drawn out and must have cost the government at least a hundred dollars. The last communication from the chief clerk was in the form of a question addressed to the chief of my division, 'Do you not think Mr. Estabrook is contumacious?', to which the chief indorsed the reply 'Yes,' and this was referred to me for cogitation. That night I wrote an essay on how and why typographical errors are made on the typewriter and why they sometimes escape detection and correction, and the next morning handed it to my chief. He and others tried to persuade me to withdraw the paper, but I flatly refused. A week went by and predictions were freely made that I would be dismissed. ~~However~~ Then the paper came back with an indorsement in the handwriting of the chief of bureau to the effect that it was the best statement he had ever seen or heard of why errors are made, commending me for its preparation, and directing that every employe of the bureau should read and note it. Later a similar correspondence started between the chief clerk and me and when my irritation became acute I sent it to the chief of the bureau with a letter inclosing my resignation, which he promptly accepted.

"I at once opened a public stenographic office in Washington, <sup>and</sup> practiced shorthand many hours daily until I got my skill back. Within a few months I was making far more than my former government salary.

"In 1899 I married and bought a house on Seventeenth Street. The next year the wife died following childbirth. A few months later the child died. I was left with a mother-in-law that was nearly insane and her malady took the form of holding me responsible for the death of her daughter and grandchild. Altogether it was a tragedy that falls to the lot of but few men. Two years later I married a second time. The second wife was a lovable little woman, but with peculiar







ideas about some things, rather along the lines of Christian Science, that is, this is the best possible of worlds, nothing evil can happen, all things work out for the best and it is not necessary to take thought or work to try to avoid disaster or win success.

"Just as I was getting well under way with the stenographic office and saw a prospect of expanding it into a profitable business she began to complain of overwork and irregular hours on my part. Irregular hours are unavoidable in a public stenographic office. This annoying fire on my domestic side became so serious that it took all the life out of the business and in the spring of 1904 I accepted a position in the Department of Agriculture at the bottom of the civil service ladder--stenographer at \$1,000 a year. It meant fairly regular hours and routine, which was what my wife wanted.

"This was the beginning of another stage and a wider horizon. I became acquainted with scientific research workers, their vocabularies, and their projects, read bulletins and began to study material at first hand. Within a few months I was promoted and transferred to become secretary to the chief of bureau. In another year I had organized a central accounting office for the bureau, became its chief, and was promoted through three clerical grades. From time to time I was entrusted with special missions for the bureau and the department, all of which extended my acquaintance with officials and the organization and work of the Department.

"In 1909 I was made chief of the Office of Congressional Distribution; in 1913 I was appointed chief clerk of the Department; and the same fall I was made chief of the Bureau of Statistics. This was reorganized the following year as the Bureau of Crop Estimates. I remained its chief until it was consolidated with the Office of Markets and the Office of Farm Management to form the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in 1921, of which I became Associate Chief. This







was a happy period because of the work, the recognition I won, the special assignments, the many interesting things I was learning, and the frequent travel to all the States and most of the larger cities of the United States. Also in 1913 I bought a small farm on Catoctin Mountain in Frederick County, Maryland, about fifty miles from Washington, where I could try out some of my agricultural theories and spend my vacations. I had an automobile, and wife and I had adopted two attractive children.

"At the close of 1922 came an unexpected offer from the Argentine government to reorganize its statistical service. The salary and the opportunity were flattering and the expenses of myself and family down and back were to be paid. We went. I was fifty three years old and had to learn the language, as well as the organization of the government and its agriculture. I worked like a Trojan, succeeded beyond my expectations, and for nearly two years we led a happy life. Incidentally I visited Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil. We returned to Washington in December, 1924, in high spirits.

"Upon arrival I was informed that I had been designated to represent the Department of Agriculture as Director of the World Agricultural Census Project at the International Institute of Agriculture at Rome. My wife refused to either consider or discuss the assignment. At first I declined because of her opposition and the sacrifice involved, although the project appealed to me strongly. This appeal, plus the official pressure that was brought to bear, led me finally to decide to make the sacrifice and assume the responsibility.

"I left home, family, friends, and business interests in April, 1925. One year was spent at headquarters in Rome studying the records of all agricultural censuses that had been taken, formulating plans, and getting various international committees to agree







upon a general census program. Early in June, 1926, I started out to visit all the capitals of the world, to discuss the census program <sup>with</sup> of the responsible officials of each government and win their support and cooperation. Incidentally I studied their agricultural situations and organization. It was a unique mission and a highly interesting one. I found the world much larger than I had conceived it to be and I got around only by making the closest connections by rail and steamer and finished <sup>near the close of</sup> ~~only in~~ 1929, but with one hundred per cent promises of cooperation in the proposed census of 1930. This, of course, was a remarkable and wonderful experience for one who was prepared for it by wide reading, a knowledge of several languages, and intimate knowledge of American agriculture and governmental organization.

"When I returned to Washington at the close of 1929 I felt that I had seen more of world agriculture and understood it better than any other man because of my preparation and unusual opportunities. That tour, of course, took me not only to the capital cities but gave me opportunities to see their palaces, their art galleries, their museums, their botanical gardens and their agricultural experiment stations. I traveled on every known kind of conveyance, ate every known kind of food, put up at all kinds of hotels, some de luxe, some mere shacks, traveled on ocean liners de luxe and took deck passage on freighters, was received by governors general, premiers, presidents, and kings, and met all kinds of people. I acquired entirely new sets of ideas about mankind, religion, morals, sanitation, customs, and human races and colors. Everywhere I went I was treated as a distinguished guest. My mission was regarded as a conspicuous success by the International Institute of Agriculture and I was feted and honored when it terminated.







"After an absence of five years, with almost annual visits to Washington of short duration, I returned. I came back flushed with success, expecting to resume my former position in the Department of Agriculture, and literally bursting with joy at the prospect of rejoining my family and settling down into routine home life again. I then experienced the disappointment of a lifetime, something equivalent to a man from the tropics thinly clad being dropped into the ~~oil~~<sup>icy</sup> waters of the Arctic ocean. The personnel of the Department of Agriculture had changed. My absence of seven years (two in the Argentine and five with the census project abroad) had made me a legendary character. I was no longer regarded as identified with the Department, although my connection had never ceased and I was still drawing a nominal salary and a travel allowance; I had become identified with the International Institute of Agriculture. I was treated as a distinguished visitor from abroad, universally addressed as 'doctor,' but when it came down to brass tacks I was given to understand indirectly--not directly--that all the higher positions were occupied and that there was no place for me.

"The family had changed. The wife had the bank account to draw upon. She had her circle of old friends. She had become accustomed to my prolonged absences. She led a peaceful and happy life during my absence. The adopted daughter had left school, developed into an offensive type of flapper, and clandestinely married a chauffeur. The adopted son had grown out of all reason. At sixteen he was over six feet tall. He had promptly abandoned school when his sister married and had settled into a life of comparative ease and picture shows. When I asked him what interested him most, he replied hesitatingly 'Nothing.' That, to me, was about the limit of human stupidity. <sup>But</sup> That, as a concomitant of his life of ease and lack of interest, he had reduced his foster mother to a state of







admiring servitude, and was inclined to be quite haughty and insolent to all persons.

"After the first novelty of my return was over it seemed clear to me that I was very much of an unwanted intrusion in my own house. Also there was a pretty steady stream of visitors to see my wife, dear to her, but to me they all seemed to have been life-long ineffectuals, superannuated, and of the parasitic type; and they too seemed to regard my presence in my own house as something of an intrusion. Then, too, the house was an old one and badly out of repair. It was back of Stoneleigh Court and within half a block of the Mayflower Hotel. As we were leaving for South America in 1922 there was a real estate boom on in the neighborhood and we had an opportunity to sell at a profit. But my wife, like most women, knew no limit, and if an offer was made she was sure that it was too low and that some one else would offer more. I charged her to sell the place if she had an opportunity during my absence, but it made no impression on her. She always hoped for more. Now I learned that there was no sale for real estate. Because of the state condition of the house we suffered from the lack of both heat and light that winter, the worst I had so far experienced.

"Clearly something had to be done. Two months elapsed before I thoroughly realized that there was no place for me in the old bureau. Neither the chief nor any one else would say so; it was simply a game of evasion and procrastination. Meanwhile my salary stopped. I saw my old friend, Dr. A. F. Woods, Director of Scientific Work, and explained the situation to him. He was interested and within a few hours arranged for my appointment as his assistant, especially to help organize the first Inter American Conference on Agriculture. While this appointment was temporary it gave me a breathing spell. I immediately got busy and worked strenuously the rest of the year look-







ing after the details of organization and entertainment with but little help and an inadequate appropriation. The Conference, when it finally came off, was considered a success and I was complimented and congratulated. But with it ended my connection with the Department that I loved, that I had helped organize, and that I regarded as a sort of alma mater.

"During the spring months I had the town house renovated, which was a rather disagreeable experience. I desired ~~that~~ that if I could ~~not~~ sell it as it was to make it habitable and comfortable either for my family or for tenants. At an expense of about two thousand dollars and much inconvenience I had a hot water heating system and electricity installed. Also the rooms were repapered.

~~"The adopted son refused to return to school. I said that the only alternative was work. This alternative proved futile because of the idiotic regulation of the District of Columbia prohibiting the gainful employment of young people under eighteen. He finally volunteered to take a correspondence course in automobiles. I paid \$165 for the course upon his promise that he would persevere and complete it. He lost interest after the first few lessons and was held to it only by constant nagging from me. My persistence in insisting that the boy should either go to school or work, and in addition ~~he~~ behave with common decency in ~~my~~ <sup>the</sup> house, alienated the affections of my wife.~~

"Came the end of 1930, the end of my temporary appointment, and the end of my salary. I had no other income. Household expenses were running about two hundred dollars a month. The adopted son, at the ripe age of seventeen, turned up one evening with a bride. A tenant on the upper floor of the house had ceased paying her rent.

"Clearly something had to be done. To me the solution seemed to be to move to the farm where we would have no rent to pay and







I could be in personal charge, and for cash income rent the town house. The wife refused to discuss such a proposal. I notified the tenant on the upper floors to vacate, but no attention was paid to it. A month went by. I began to pack up, unaided and alone in a hostile atmosphere. Before the second month expired I notified the wife and the tenant that on the first of the succeeding month the electricity, the gas, the water, and the heat would be turned off, and I would move and would expect them to move. I placed the house in the hands of real estate agents and advertised it for rent. Only then did the wife and the tenant take notice. Wife announced her intention of remaining in Washington and of obtaining employment and becoming independent. I told her to go ahead and so long as my savings held out I would send her fifty dollars a month.

"So it was that on the first of March, 1931, my things went out in a van to the farm and I supplied a van to move my wife's things and those of the tenant to an apartment. The next week I learned that wife had brought the adopted son and his wife under her wing at the apartment. Of course that arrangement did not last, nor did the wife find the remunerative employment she thought she could get for the asking. The whole thing was tragic, because of all things the young people did not want a foster mother or mother-in-law with her ultra old-fashioned ideas to supervise and regulate their ultra modern ideas and behavior with respect to sexual license and 'the world owes us a living and a good time'.

"After clearing the house I drove out to Frederick and joined the van with my household goods. I led the way up the mountain until the van stalled on the last lap and had to back out and deposit the goods in the community school house. I lived with my sister and mother for some weeks. They had agreed to keep house for me at the farm. Then followed a strenuous period of renovating the farm house, installing







a water system, a heating system, and an electric lighting system. When this was completed we moved in and were very comfortable. Next came the rush of the flower season. It was disappointing because of a drouth that began eighteen months before and which continued for two years, resulting in almost complete crop failures.

"Aside from financial worries and official disappointments, I was about to realize the dream of years, saddened by the absence of my wife. The farm ~~was~~ was planned and planted as a flower farm, because of all things I loved flowers, and so far they had proved profitable. The farm was situated on top of the mountain overlooking Frederick and the rich valley about it. The situation was ideal. I thoroughly enjoyed looking over my own fields and a million dollars worth of scenery spread out before me. I fitted <sup>up</sup> one of the stone cabins ~~up~~ as a study and in it I had my collection of books and souvenirs. With the opening of the flower season visitors began to arrive. Mother had sent some of my travel letters to the local paper and I found that I was known throughout the county. Calls came for addresses before civic organizations to which I responded for the purpose of making friends. But it was a drouth year and the flowers did not pay expenses. Also I suffered a great ~~disappointment~~ disillusionment. I clearly remembered my youthful strength, expert skill in handling all farm tools, and the joy of physical labor in the sunshine and open air. In the morning, when fully rested and fresh, I felt as young, as competent, and as enthusiastic as when I was eighteen. Perhaps for the first five minutes I would thoroughly enjoy the feel of the hoe in my hands. In fifteen minutes of unaccustomed exertion ~~and~~ I would begin to realize that I was perspiring freely, ~~and~~ panting for breath, and feeling very tired. But this feeling of exhaustion was so incredible that I would persist awhile longer and then reluctantly and disgustedly give up. My only consolation was <sup>the thought</sup> that perhaps after repeated efforts my strength







would return. It never did. It was a long, bitter, and exhausting lesson before I realized that I was older, that nearly half a century of office work had unfitted me for manual labor, and I <sup>should have to</sup> ~~could~~ become reconciled to the fact that I was an old man physically.

"The drouth continued for two years more, quite as severe as anything in Arizona or New Mexico, although the Weather Bureau took little notice of it. No crops were raised on my place. The water supply gave out and we had to fall back on a spring.

"Meanwhile expenses went on. Fortunately the town house was rented, first for \$1,000 a year and then \$900. The taxes were a little over \$400 and annual repairs took another \$100; but the remainder meant a cash income. At the end of six months I learned that I could be retired and receive a pension because of 'involuntary separation from the service.' I took advantage of this provision of law and was granted a pension, but because my retirement occurred before I was seventy years old I received only \$67.44 a month, although I had served nearly thirty-eight years and my salary the last five years had been \$6,000 and my contribution to the retirement fund correspondingly large. Nevertheless this pension was a life-saver. I had been let out at the beginning of a major business depression; the town house, assessed at about \$24,000, was unsalable and the rental brought in little more than the exorbitant taxes and cost of insurance and repairs. The farm, in the midst of an unprecedented drouth and ruinously low prices, did not pay expenses and was a liability rather than an asset. Also the farm was unsalable at any price. Nothing to do but stand fast and take the gaff. By 1932 I had exhausted my savings and had to borrow on the town property. Also it was clear that I could not support two households and, after much correspondence, my wife agreed to re-join me. Another year followed and again I had to borrow, this time on my life insurance policy. And the next year the same situation







and another loan was secured by mortgaging the lower farm.

"Hoping against hope that the Department of Agriculture might find some way of utilizing my unusual experience and realizing my utter incapacity for manual labor, I set about writing up my travel and diary notes--a sort of biography, thinking that the part relating to my world travels at least might be interesting to others. The first draft was done in shorthand and afforded me much pleasure, because while doing it I lived over what to me was a very interesting life. This kept me occupied and contented until I brought the account up to my coming to the farm. Then came the drudgery of typing a transcript, with the realization that it all had to be revised and rewritten.

"I made good progress with the typewriting until last December. Then my eyes failed me--which was the supreme tragedy.

"With the aid of two pairs of glasses and a magnifying glass I can just make out the headlines to newspapers but not the text. Books of reference are useless to me because of their fine print. All literature is closed to me. In the open I cannot distinguish blades of grass or small flowers. I cannot recognize faces beyond a few feet. Fortunately I can still see large objects and at a considerable distance. I am afraid to drive a car because I can neither see nor read signs or other small objects. I can see an approaching car about a hundred yards away, but if the driver put out his hand as a signal I could not see it. I realize that while this semi-blindness lasts I have no business to drive a car.

"So here I am at sixty-five unable to read, unable to finish my manuscript or to revise what I have already written, and hesitate to drive a car. The beauties of nature are now lost to me. The farms have not paid expenses for several years and are a liability and not an asset. My income is insufficient to support them longer and if







I tried to sell them now it would have to be at a considerable sacrifice. Expenses have exceeded income steadily for three years and I have borrowed until I now owe more than five thousand dollars. This excess of expenses over income month after month has not been pleasant to contemplate. Until my eyes failed I hoped that I might find some employment, or at least turn out some manuscript that might be salable. Now my semiblindness incapacitates me for employment of any kind.

"In addition to physical and financial incapacity I have been conscious for some months of a sort of physical disintegration, in spite of the fact that my general health has been good and I look well. It has come in the form of fugitive neurotic pains, especially in fingers, toes, and shoulders, along with a feeling of mental inertia and physical lethargy. Gone is the surplus energy of former years that made me find joy in work and feel capable of doing anything that any other human being could accomplish, joy in exercise physical or mental. Instead, rest and quiet are delicious and necessary. Unless this feeling changes and my blindness passes it looks like the beginning of the end--and it will be welcome.

"Yet, let me count my blessings. I was so curious, so observant, so active, studied and read so much, traveled so far and widely, met so many people in all stages of life, and had so many interesting experiences, that my memory chest is full to bursting and I can never want for entertainment or be lonely. If beauty of form and color are lost to me I can still hear and music remains, which is always a delight. If I cannot read the newspapers I can hear the news summaries over the radio. I can still enjoy conversation with others. If my real estate can be sold without too great a sacrifice I can perhaps pay what I owe and have enough left for a modest home in a city, with enough income to live on without falling behind each month. I say in







a city, because if I can neither see nor work there is no object in remaining in the country with all its inconveniences and worries. Then, too, I can still typewrite, although I cannot see what I have written.

"Also there is left Hope, hope that springs eternal in the human breast. I may recover a sort of second sight. My fugitive pains may disappear--as so many have done in the past. I may be able to bring my expenses within my income. I may be able to finish my manuscript and continue to amuse myself with writing. I may be able to eliminate the worries of trying to support two farms, and enjoy peace and quiet in the years that yet remain.

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Leon M. Estabrook.

(The foregoing represents my mood and thought<sup>t</sup> as, at the age of 64 65, I faced the gloomy specter of old age, debt, physical disability,<sup>pain,</sup> and Blindness.)



